What can I do?

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WHAT CAN I DO? or Personal Responsibility.

Mtt.4:17"Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
"Repent, for the Reign of heaven is near."
"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is coming."

INTRO. Thirty years ago a billion dollars was just about as large and far away from our comprehensions as the sun is from the earth. Today, a billion dollars is but a bit of pin-money in the pocket of Uncle Sam. So long ago also the emphasis was upon individualism and personal initiative and freedom. At that time a social gospel was dondemned, and such socially-minded men as Walter Rousenbush were practically thrown out of the church. Since then our thinking has swung to the other extreme. We think today in terms of the social and economic order and we devise legislation accordingly. Our problems today are on the same scale. World-problems dealing with world trade, production and distribution; problems in which the state reduces its citizens to mere cogs in the wheel and fodder for cannon. Econonomic problems, such as capital and labor in which the relation between employer and employee is no longer as ~~one~~ between two individuals- it is consolidated interests against ~~org~~ unionized labor. And in ~~all~~ our mass-thinking today we have all but lost sight of individual responsibility.

Naturally our religious outlook is affected by our world outlook. We swing with the tide, whatever be the extreme one way or the other. But ~~nobody~~ to swing with the tide ~~is~~ may be merely drifting. Christians, in their thinking and attitudes and conduct should be like the Rock of Gibraltar, standing firmly and securely no matter which way the world tides are running. To this end let us center our thinking this a.m. in answer to the simple direct question, "What can I do, as a follower of the Christ, to make this world better than it is, to head its changing directions into a steady flow towards its ultimate goal-the kingdom of God on earth, the rule of God in the hearts and lives of His children?

For this consideration no better text can be found than Matthew 4:17, the opening words of Jesus' ministry, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

First of all let us get a right understanding of the word, "repent". It is commonly interpreted as being sorry for one's sins and asking God for forgiveness, a sort of an apology to the Father witha promise to do better.

In the Greek of the text repentence means changing one's mind for betterment; the kind of thinking that leads to a change of character, a directing of desires and a ruling of conduct ~~to~~ fit him for a definite betterment. In this case it is to fit him for the coming kingdom of God, that rule of God in the hearts and lives of men that will transform the world of human affairs into allignment with the will of God, into harmony with His sense of right conduct, justice, honesty, goodness and love.

Our text gives us two implications in regard to the Kingdom. The Kingdom is established within each person who thus changes his mind to fit himself for entrance into it. "The Kingdom of God is within you".

The Kingdom is also a growth in the world, slow but sure, by the process of the ever increasing numbers of those who enter in and by their personal influence in the world.

I. Thus we see that the relation ~~of~~ between the individual who enters in and the Kingdom itself is a direct binding one, and that the personal responsibility of each individual member ~~of~~ to the Kingdom is very great.

1. The question put to Mrs. Roosevelt-"What can we do to help the cause of peace in the world?" her answer- "The place to begin is at home, within each of yourselves. Practice peace within your own heart and life, in your own home and community, among your own selves."

2. Likewise the responsibility for <u>all</u> our social evils rests afteral upon the individuals who compose the social order. Prof. Henry Pratt Fairchild, in attempting to tell us just what <u>the</u> social problem is, says: "To bring such influence to bear upon every individual that he will submit tractably to the regulations that is necessary for all, and display the kind of behavior that is requisite of all, is the greatest problem that society has to face- it is <u>the</u> social problem."

3. In like manner, ~~Likewise~~ Jesus makes it plain that the success of the Kingdom of God upon earth depends upon the kind of personal intelligence, character and behavior requisite to it.

4. War is a social sin and one of the world's most ~~damning~~ destructive evils, but war is the outcome of the way multitudes of individuals behave.

Economic evil is a social sin which blasts multitudes of

lives, but economic evil arises from the way multitudes of individuals behave and think.

Let me put it another way. ~~Your~~ My selfishness, ignorance, prejudice, superstition, wrong doing, ~~and your~~ and wilful disobedience to the laws of God, and the evil that is in each of you and ~~of~~ every other person living constitutes the evil that is in the world. On the other hand, whatever of good you and I may have and whatever good there is in each individual constituting the population of mankind represents all the good there is in the world. Social evils and economic disorders and political chicanery and international disturbances are the result of individual ~~responsibility~~ conduct, whatever the social grouping of the individual may be. The responsibility of all evil and sin in the world is mainly an individual responsibility. Likewise, the responsibility for the world's betterment rests mainly upon each individual person living in the world.

What can I do to establish God's rule on earth? First of all Imyself must establish that rule in my own heart and life. Just as Jesus truly represented the character ~~of~~ and will of God in his own life and conduct, so we, his followers must first of all and above all seek to do the same.

Every once in a great while somebody comes to me after the service and says, "You must have had me in mind this morning." If Jesus were preaching to you this morning, every one of you would know definitely that he would be speaking to each of you personally. And how! In speaking of the personal penetrating power of Jesus in dealing with the individual, someone has said that Jesus regarded every person as though he were an island around which he sailed until he saw jsut where the real problem was and then he landed! He sailed around the rich young ruler and landed on the money question. He sailed around the woman of Samaria and landed on the family problem. He sailed around Zacchaeas and landed on the question of honesty.

I remember when but a lad I visited the World's Fair at San Francisco. I have since forgotten most of it, but one exhibit still stands out strikingly in my memorn. The Chamber of Mirrors! In that place I saw myself coming and going in all directions and I saw myself in all manner of grotesque shapes.....at first it convulsed me with laughter, it was so funny, but finally it turned into a chamber of Horrors! Such hideous shapes and all in my own image. In the mirror of the Kingdom of God, how do you appear? Are you an asset to it or a hinderance?

If Jesus were sailing around you and around me right here and now, where would he land?

I know it is hard to face oneself. Self is usually the last person we care to face. But we cant be true to God and others until we learn to be true to ourselves, to our better selves, to the godlikeness that lies within us, that is within our power to awaken and bring to active service if we will but accept the help of God so to do.

The whole Bible teaches that we must love others as we love ourselves. But suppose we dont love ourselves enough to be decent and pure and clean, suppose we dont love ourselves enough to be thotful and considerate and kind, suppose we dont care for ourselves enough to strive to attain onto the highest and best and most worthwhile, how can we love others? Only as we change ourselves into the likeness of the kingdom can we influence others to be likewise changed. I believe that the change of outward circumstances will help to change the persons who live in them, but it is also true that changed persons can change circumstances. Jesus knew that the Kingdom of God would fail unless those who entered in would repent, would change their character their thinking and their ways to fit the kingdom.

The power of Jesus over our lives is not contained in his teachings along, but in his own personal character and conduct which ring true to his teachings. Follow him from his cradle to his cross and you can find no inconsistency between himself as he is in character and as he acts in conduct and what he professes to be.

Let us pray- Oh, blessed Lord, as you sail around each one of us this morning and land, may we give you welcome even as did the woman of Samaria and Zacchaeas and the disciples and the Apostle Paul. Cleanse our hearts and lives from everything that is keeping us out of thy kingdom of love and goodness and making us hindrances to others from entering in. Thy kingdom come! Amen.